

Art in America

MAY-JUNE 1969 \$2.50

N. E. THING CO.
PHOTO DEPARTMENT



ACT # 21 Longanow,
DATE Winnipeg, Wash
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE 1968

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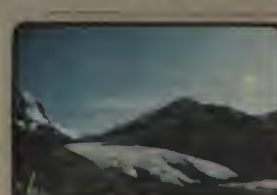
ACT # 23 NEPTUNE BLOCK
WATERFRONT, NEW
B.C. 1968

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ACT # 20 Robt. MORRIS'S
254 FELT PIECES
1968

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ACT # 21 COLUMBIA GLACIER
DATE ALBERTA, CANADA
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE 1968

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RUBBER OVER BRUSH. Model
DATE
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE
OVER 10 ACRES OF BRUSHLAND →

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ACT # 6 DAVE BULK FORD
DEALERS, MARINE DRIVE
N. Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1968

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ACT # 15 - Gas storage tanks
DATE 1968
Edmonton, Alberta
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE 1968

N. E. THING CO.



ACT # 30 CEMENT CLARK Bldg
DATE JUST W. ADELPHI
12th, N. VANCOUVER, B.C.
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

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ACT # 5 FIRE BREAK,
W. OF PORT ARTHUR, ONT.
1968

N. E. THING CO.



THING DEPT.
Wearable green volume

N. E. THING CO.



ACT # 15 Trench gravel filled
DATE
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

N. E. THING CO.



ACT # 30 CEMENT CLARK Bldg
DATE JUST W. ADELPHI
12th, N. VANCOUVER, B.C.
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

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ACT # 3 BRIDGE support,
BANFF NAT. PARK
1968

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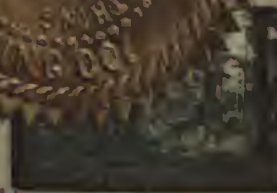
ACT # 6 DAVE BULK FORD
DEALERS, MARINE DRIVE
N. Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1968

N. E. THING CO.
OBJECTS DEPARTMENT



Model for 10 mile by 10 mile
DATE
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE
PACIFIC OCEAN, 1968-69

N. E. THING CO.



ACT # 30 CEMENT CLARK Bldg
DATE JUST W. ADELPHI
12th, N. VANCOUVER, B.C.
VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



Art in America

May-June 1969

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Feature: Impossible Art

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The latest breed of artist-innovators turn out products that are unsalable, uncollectable, unshowable—products recognized by no known bureau of standards. Hardly solemn but serious, these headstrong creations reveal the shape of a new movement that makes the earlier esthetic revolutions of this century look tame

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Cover: A slide series of "things" that provide the stock-in-trade of Iain Baxter, Canadian artist-entrepreneur and notable exponent of the "impossible art" featured in this issue. As the founder of ACT, an organization whose name means Aesthetically Claimed Things, Baxter has appropriated landscapes, buildings, highways, manufactured objects—and paintings and sculptures by other artists—as works of art. His total operations comprise the N. E. Thing Co., and the "N. E. Thing" (if you say it aloud) points up the "anything" character of his outlook. "Anything's a masterpiece," he says. This cover, photographed by Geoffrey Clements, carries the impressive seal of approval of the N. E. Thing Co.

IMPOSSIBLE ART—WHAT IT IS

David L. Shirey



If nature has undergone an assault by modern technology, why shouldn't nature retaliate and attack technology? Dennis Oppenheim thinks so and, to show it, has covered a New York City asphalt parking lot with one of nature's staples, salt. And logically enough, the title is "Salt Flat." Photo by Robert O'Connor.

Impossible art, paradoxically, is possible. Indeed, today it is what the avant-garde sensibility is all about, what the bright new artists are thinking about. But what they're thinking is not simply the traditional disavowal of an older art style and the concomitant statement of their new esthetic.

Impossible art insists upon reworking the whole art world as we know it—a complicated cosmorama of dealers, private collectors, galleries, museums, critics and art historians—as well as the ways of looking at art. The "impossible" artists seem to be saying that we desperately need a new system for a new art. "Art is in a state of grand upheaval," says critic Harold Rosenberg, and William Rubin of the Museum of Modern Art adds that there is a "frustration among young artists. They believe that the art and the art world we know have been used up."

Much of today's art is impossible for private collections, galleries, museums and artists' studios because of its outsized dimension. Some of it is impossible because in its "finished form" it exists only as an idea and not as an object and therefore cannot be bought and sold. It is also impossible if it exists only as a proposal on paper and cannot be realized for lack of funds or technological know-how. Certain works are impossible in the light of traditional art concepts because these works are not entities within themselves but become artistic creations only as the artist or spectator adds or subtracts from them. Impossible art flies in the face of the Renaissance canons with their decrees of order, harmony and proportion which have dominated artistic thinking for centuries; it is often an art of chaos, disorder, with total disregard for harmony and the relationship of parts. A significant segment of current art is impossible because it denies and decries the age-old tenet of permanence; some pieces are conceived as artistic objects only when they are being destroyed. "Art" has become an impossible term for the "artist" who sees *everything* as a work of art, ridiculing the shrines of the masterpiece.

Big-scale art has been perhaps the major cause of impossible art. Ever since the abstract expressionists began, after World War II, to slash their immense emotions onto immense canvases, art has become increasingly bigger. In its inexorable strides toward gigantism, art has pushed out of the galleries and museums and now is waging an assault on vast areas of the earth, water and sky.

David L. Shirey is art editor of *Newsweek* magazine; before he transferred to New York he was a *Newsweek* correspondent reporting from Rome and the Mediterranean area. His writings have appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and in other art journals. A gratifying result of our project to explore "impossible art" is the decision of the Los Angeles County Museum to organize a coordinated exhibition (June 2–July 13) based on the concepts and content presented by Mr. Messer and Mr. Shirey.

Earthworks

The earth has been rediscovered. Like explorers of a refound wilderness, artists suddenly appreciate the earth in all its facets as a fascinating medium of expression. "The earth is beautiful," says Robert Morris, who has been piling up mounds of dirt at a Midwestern university and is now planning to kick up a dust storm in the heart of Kansas with the mighty thrust of four jet engines. Pop artist Claes Oldenburg dug a grave in Central Park and then filled it up. "I was able to create from earth an invisible sculpture of negative and positive spaces," he said. Walter de Maria went to the Mojave Desert where he incised into the sand two mile-long chalk lines on which he hopes to build two twelve-foot-high concrete walls. Looking for wider spaces, he headed for the Sahara and the deserts of India to dig cyclopean trenches that he would eventually photograph with a satellite camera.

The earth artists also bring the country to the city. Robert Smithson goes to the pine barrens of New Jersey or even the slag heaps of the Ruhr Valley in Germany and brings back samples of his works, or what he calls "non-sites." De Maria filled three rooms of a Munich gallery with eight tons of "pure dirt, pure earth, pure land," and Morris mixed earth with tar, petroleum jelly and other gelatinous substances for a show at the Dwan Gallery in New York. Indeed, through the shows it presented last fall, Dwan has virtually appropriated the term "earthworks." And "Earth Art" became an official category this year with a museum exhibition at Cornell University.

Grandson of a California mining engineer and son of a geologist, Mike Heizer has a kinship with nature which has culminated



If you can't take the country out of nature you can take nature out of the country. In this framed earthwork Robert Smithson has brought nature and technology together by placing rocks he gathered in the country into sleek metal bins.

All materials are beautiful to Robert Morris. This earthwork, right, shown at the Dwan Gallery in New York, is a combination of steel rods, tar, felt, gelatinous substances, with a predominance of soil heaped into a sizable mound.



in the creation of giant trenches that he gouges out of the Nevada and California flatlands with pickaxes, shovels and wheelbarrows. They stretch, intermittently, for distances as great as six hundred miles, and from the air they offer the same impact as the ancient Peruvian anthropomorphic configurations that turn deserts into megamasterpieces. Laid out with plumbs, transits and a compass, his land labors curve and recurve like a giant's calligraphy; other long rectangular trenches look like the negative spaces left by mammoth sequoia trunks thrown from the air.

For Heizer, the voids are "negative objects." At odds with an art world that is impossibly "full of objects already," Heizer refuses to make an object. "Artists have been misled into thinking that you have to create something in order to contribute to art," he says. "I want to create without creating a thing. I want to create without mass and volume."

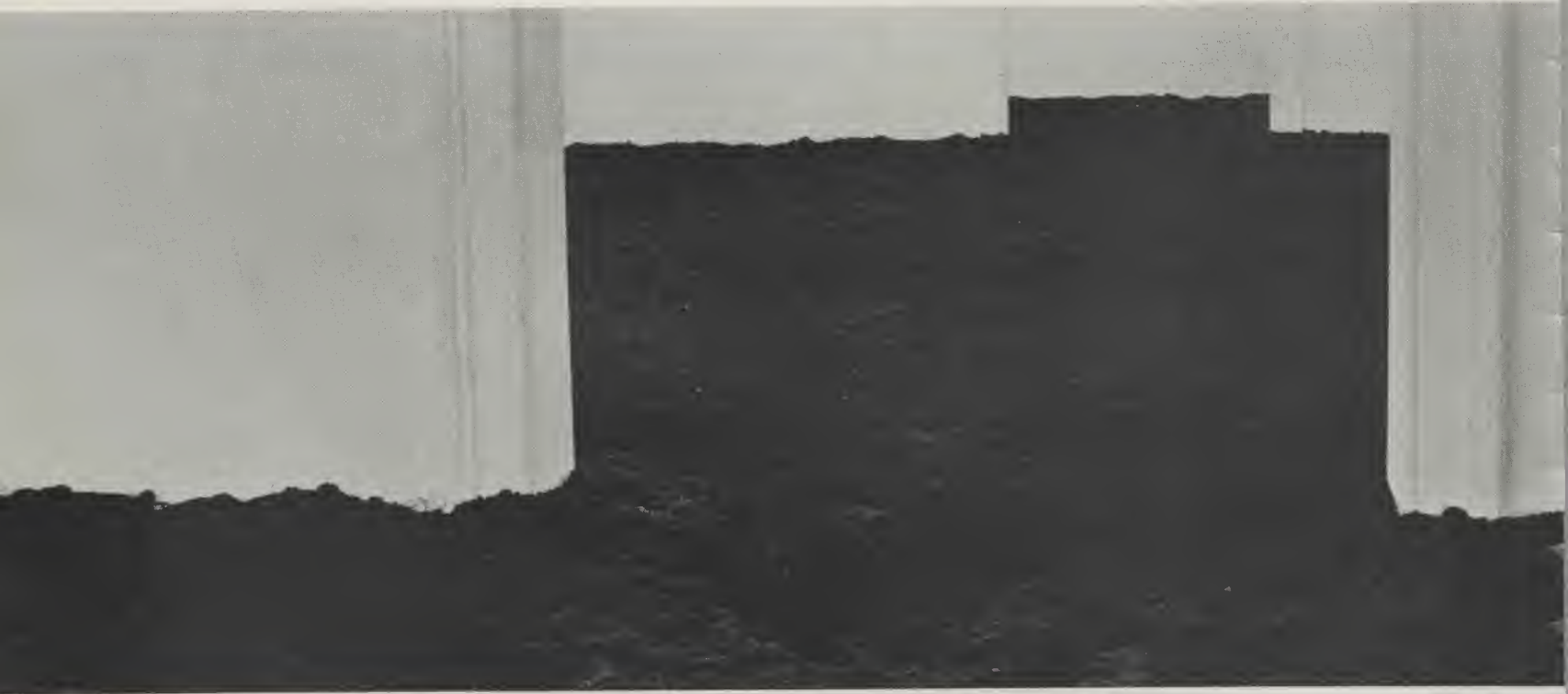
Heizer's art is a very personal thing: "I make it for myself and for art but for no one else." Yet New York avant-garde collector Robert Scull commissioned Heizer to join several Nevada dry lakes with a series of holes. "I've collected art for the last ten years because I love it and I want to own it," says Scull. "It ennobled me and my surroundings. But things have changed with the discovery of Heizer's work. My walls used to be my gallery. Now the vast open spaces have become my gallery." After Heizer had moved the earth into new shapes, Scull met him in Las Vegas, and the two of them took off for the almost inaccessible art site. "I have nothing left but the memory of my superb experience and a precise documentation of all that Heizer did," says Scull. "Art is only memory anyway," says Heizer.

Landscape was considered one of the lowest types of subject matter until the seventeenth century, when Dutch painters like Ruysdael and Hobbema brought to it a pantheistic vision of the universe. Yet Dennis Oppenheim is more like Horace Walpole in the eighteenth century or Jongkind and Boudin in the nineteenth. They saw nature as a protective refuge against the dehumanizing industrial age.

As if to raise an outcry against smothering nature with cities and all their attendant trappings, Oppenheim covered a New York City asphalt parking lot with "a good grade of finely granulated baker's salt." The thousand-square-foot expanse was "salt of the earth" triumphing over the new technologies.

Oppenheim has made delicate visual statements about the impingements of nature and technology upon each other by scattering V-shaped wood blocks in an "avalanche" that rolled down a Long Island Expressway escarpment. He spread concentric pilings of aluminum over a country field and laid out wired snow fences over a grain crop. He re-rakes a plowed field or even superimposes, through photographs, the contours of an Ecuadorian volcano on ten miles of wheat. "It's not concentration upon an object," says Oppenheim. "It's concentration upon interrelationships of elements of interpenetrating influences."

"The works of these innovators are an attempt to be as big as the life we live today, the life of immensity and boundless geography," says Dr. Lawrence Hatterer, who has spent ten years psychoanalyzing artists. "But it's also the manifestation of a desire to escape the city that is eating us alive, and perhaps a farewell to space and earth while there are still some left."



The latest in art can be "dirty business," as in the Heiner-Friedrich Gallery, Munich, which earthworker Walter de Maria filled with eight tons of "pure dirt, pure earth, pure land."

Many things cannot grow in the desert, but art can. Photographed shortly after completion in 1968 is Mike Heizer's 120-foot-long trench, "Circumflex," one of nine works commissioned by collector Robert Scull. Located at Massacre Dry Lake near Vya, Nevada, the work took about a day to dig; it is now free to change and slowly disappear.

Waterworks



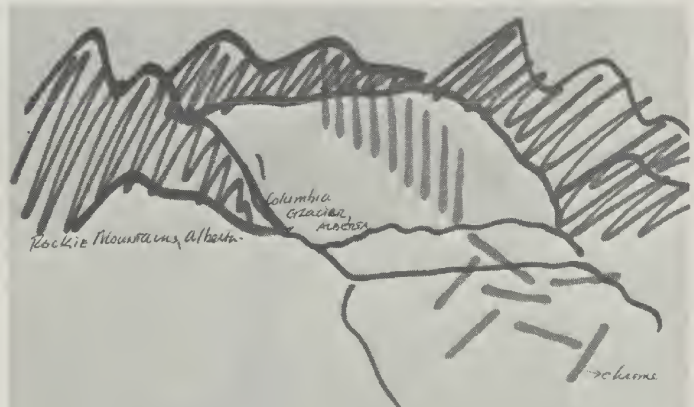
They go back to the Rubens-type of workshop tradition and eschew individual creativity as "impossible in such a complicated world." "Personal artistic expression is obsolete," they say. They are not interested in producing art objects for galleries and museums but in creating works of art for public use.

"They" is Palsa, a Yale University-based group of six men whose chosen name has no particular meaning, but who are vitally involved with works of art which "make meaningful use of current phenomena of the technological environment." Their art form is impossible except in "vast spaces accessible at times uncommonly available in nine-to-five institutions."

The reason is that their art work takes place in water and at night. Like esthete-aquanuts, they recently placed fifty-five xenon strobe lights under water in the four-acre pond of the Boston Gardens. Around the pond, above water, they rigged up fifty-two poly-planar speakers, which were programmed by elements of analogue and digital computers. Since the lighting fixtures were not visible beneath the surface of the water and the speakers were inconspicuous, the effect was perceived entirely as light flashes and sound presences, a glittering display of water, sound and light. "Television, films, the complex interplay of urban sounds and lights, and experiences such as driving on highways at night through darting streams of automobile headlights have involved our culture in areas of new perception," states Palsa. "We try to make meaningful and pleasurable these experiences which are constantly present in our daily lives."

(continued)

This is an Alberta, Canada, snowwork that becomes a waterwork. Iain Baxter, president of the N. E. Thing Co., has designed a project for which he plunges chrome poles into the Columbia Glacier. The poles work their way down to the river below as the snow melts.



N. E. THING CO.
PROJECTS DEPARTMENT
CHROME POLES PROJECT - 1968



ACT 21. COLUMBIA GLACIER,
ALBERTA, CANADA. 1968.

Pulsa's plans for the future include working with the ocean. As oceanographers, they hope to create a light-and-water environment that will be even "more vague." "Possible art talks of dimensions and limits," they say. "Physical boundaries dissolve in our works. There are no limits, only ambiguities."

"I want to cover thousands of square miles," declares earth artist Dennis Oppenheim. To achieve that, he has also begun working with water. Last winter he ventured into upper New York State, where he created his "ice pieces." With big-toothed saws, he cut huge pieces from the ice on a lake. The liberated pieces were then allowed to float freely about the lake. He journeyed to Maine and worked snowscapes into new configurations. "This is the most grandiose art ever imagined," says Oppenheim. "It comes from a conceptual order in which ideas can be quickly extrapolated. If an artist has to spend a lot of time learning a craft like welding, he doesn't have the time to carry out all his ideas. I can do more, for it takes little time to carry out my ideas."

Water as ice also fascinates Iain Baxter of Vancouver, British

Columbia. He has designed a series of chrome poles that are to be driven into a glacier on a mountainside five feet apart and with forty feet of each pole showing. As the glacier slowly advances, the poles topple down and come to rest on the icy lake below. Baxter's *Underwater Moving Thing* is simply an underwater moving thing balanced by floats and weights. It is to be seen by casual passers-by on ocean liners, if the "thing" is placed in the ocean. "It could also be arranged for the Great Lakes," says Baxter. Baxter has even claimed waterworks that he didn't work on. "I have, however, recognized that they are art works," says Baxter. "And I want to bring them to the attention of the public as art works." Reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp proclaiming an object to be a work of art if he said so, Baxter has set up ACT, his own organization whose name means Aesthetically Claimed Things. *ACT No. 32* is the gravel-filled steel pilings in Whitelake, Ontario. ACT has also claimed landscapes, buildings, highways and works by other artists as works of art. "Anything can be a work of art if we have a sensitivity to it," says Baxter, president of the N. E. Thing Co. "Anything's a masterpiece."



Above: The Pulsa group are aquanauts who created this shimmering waterwork in Boston. They placed 55 xenon lights under the water and were able to trap some of the fascinating effects of light deflected through water.

Left: Iain Baxter's N. E. Thing Co. has a division called ACT, an acronym for Aesthetically Claimed Things. Like Duchamp, Baxter can proclaim anything a work of art. One of the waterworks Baxter has claimed as an art work is this lake adorned with such riparian delights as the plastic tube and the two bathing beauties.

Skyworks

Caught up in a world of rockets, space technologies and interplanetary exploration, some artists have turned into poetic cosmonauts. Using the sky as his only limit, Forrest Myers launched his space career when he shot the brilliant light paths of four arc lamps into the air, piercing a spectacular volume of twenty billion cubic feet. "It's a lot of activated space," he says. "It creates its own dynamic world pavilion below, and you can see all sides of the work at once."

He has now designed a "rocket piece" which will consist of four rockets spread one mile apart. They will be ignited at the same instant and will soar to the sky, leaving behind four differently colored smoke trails. Eight miles aloft, the lines, according to Myers, "will diminish and you won't be able to see them anymore."

Richard Serra created an "impossible" work in Italy a few years ago by putting farm animals in a Rome gallery to "see the chance configurations of their community excrement." ("Is it possible to have such important shows in New York galleries?" he asks.) Now he is taking to space. Fascinated by the properties

Is it a tufted bird? An Amish Superman? No, it's James Lee Byars' "pretend" plane, a satin fuselage for 100 passengers, with Byars, its creator, seated in the cockpit, waiting for his passengers to come aboard. Photo by Robert A. Propper.



of lead, he has devised a new "impossible" project: while flying a plane he will throw out, at an opportune moment, molten lead. "It's impossible to get permission," says Serra. "But I could make a perfect sphere out of lead that way. Artists must try the impossible and flush out all the latent invisible information waiting to be made visible. Space is one of the unexplored areas that must become the artist's tool."

Minimal artist Tony Smith, noted for his basic geometric sculptures, was, as a boy in New Jersey, "infatuated with the blimps, not dirigibles," that he saw flying near the coast. "Blimps are soft and pliable," he says; "dirigibles have hard structures." He is now making "balloon blimps" out of a synthetic material to "discover new compressive strengths and explore the properties of floating."

Dressed in a Mennonite suit and boutonniere with a dandelion, "the world's most intelligent flower," James Lee Byars seems always to have thought in global terms. "Every impossible thing I can think of is possible," he says. "Everything I think already exists. Everything exists in any possibility." Last year Byars gave one of his works to space by sending aloft a helium-filled balloon

to which was attached a mile-long shimmering gold thread. After getting "almost impossible" permission from the Federal Aviation Agency he "lost the work of art forever without having had a tracking catalogue raisonné device."

His twenty-five-pound pink satin airplane, a hundred feet long by a hundred feet wide, was built for "a hundred people who want to fly in a pink airplane." He asks his passengers to "pretend that you're flying." But then he wonders, "How long can one pretend?"

If Byars decides against covering the globe with balloons and planes, he may try to envelop it in clothing. He recently made a red silk dress for five hundred people who were later divided into groups of five to go to a party together. Standing in midtown Manhattan, the five hundred merry-makers draped the "world's largest dress" over themselves and almost circumscribed an entire city block. "I would like to put the whole world in the same dress," says Byars. Then he asks, "Why do women have to wear dresses and men pants anyway?" His yellow-cloth banana is more intimate and "holds five people together in one of the tastiest foods of man."

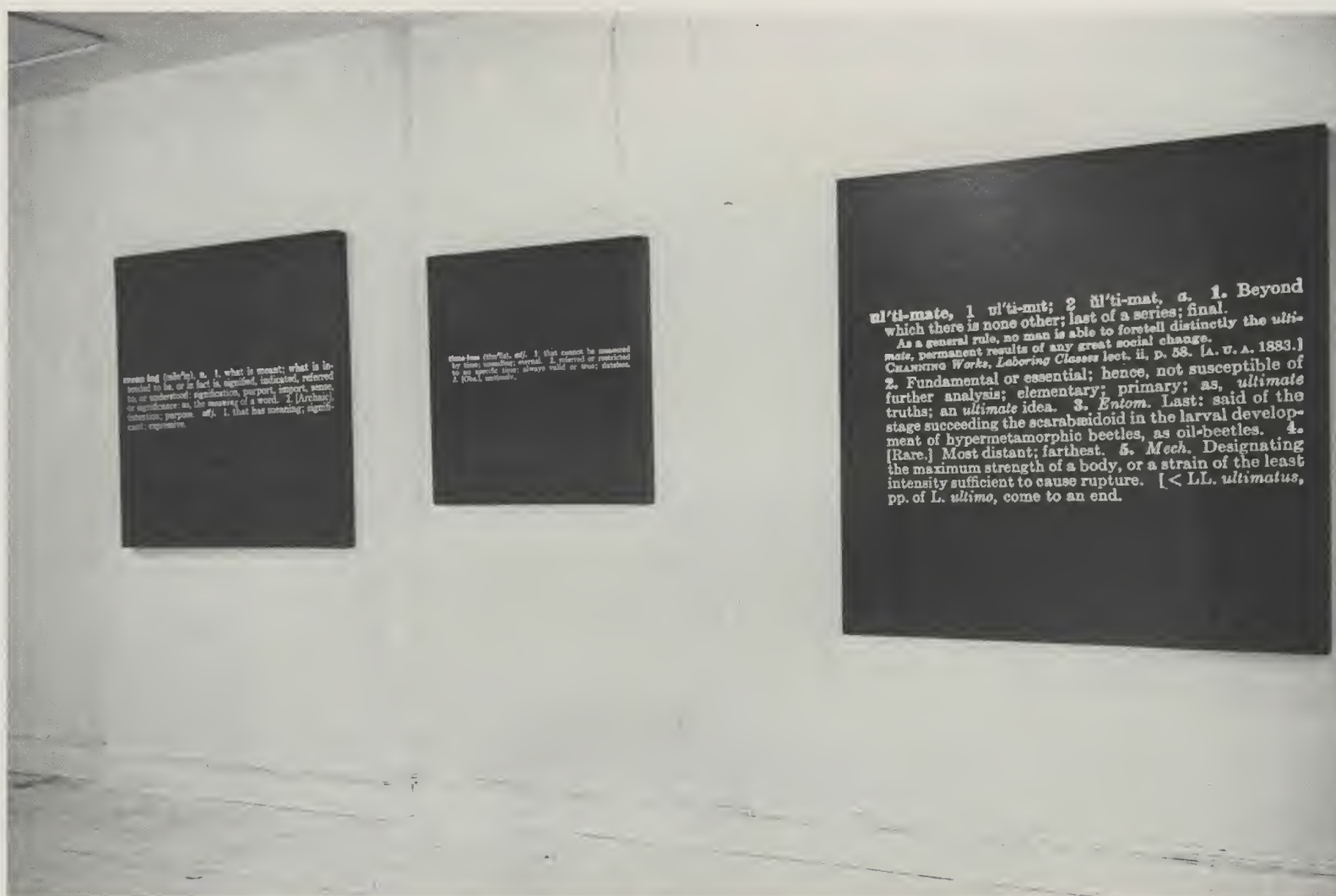


This skywork of four carbon arcs piercing 20 billion cubic feet of sky over New York City was made by Forrest Myers, who also experiments with laser beams and rockets. Photo by Fred W. McDarrah.

Thinkworks

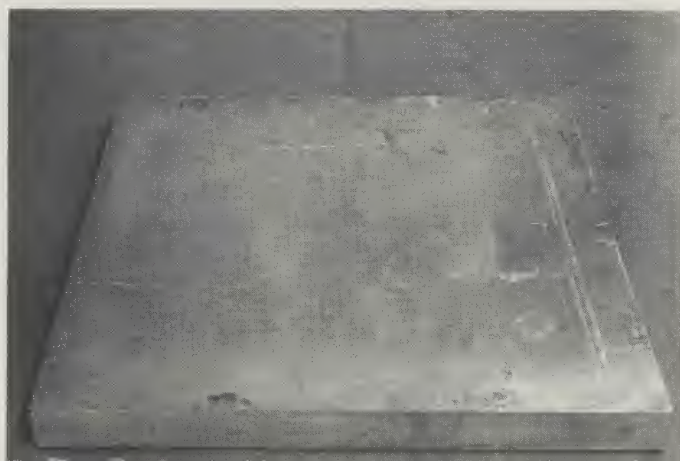
When Seth Siegelaub opened his new New York gallery in January his aim was to "articulate some basic ideas regarding 'conceptuality' and 'immateriality.'" "Who needs a gallery?" asks Siegelaub, who sponsors artists like Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry and Ian Wilson. Operating out of his house, Siegelaub says, "You don't need walls to show ideas. People who have galleries can show their objects in only one place at a time. I'm not limited. I can have my ideas in twenty different places at once. Ideas are faster than tedious objects. Artists have finally been accepted as idea men and not merely as craftsmen with poetic thoughts." Another thinkworks dealer, John Gibson, handles conceptual art almost exclusively and at most requires exhibition space for drawings of the concepts. "I'm trying," he says, "to circumvent the whole gallery concept. You can call me an idea broker, not an object merchant."

The object was already anxious about its dignity before Robert Rauschenberg erased a De Kooning drawing and then exhibited it as an "erased De Kooning by Rauschenberg." Now, for many artists, "object" is nothing more than a dirty word. Douglas Huebler, of Boston, says that "art has nothing to do with some-

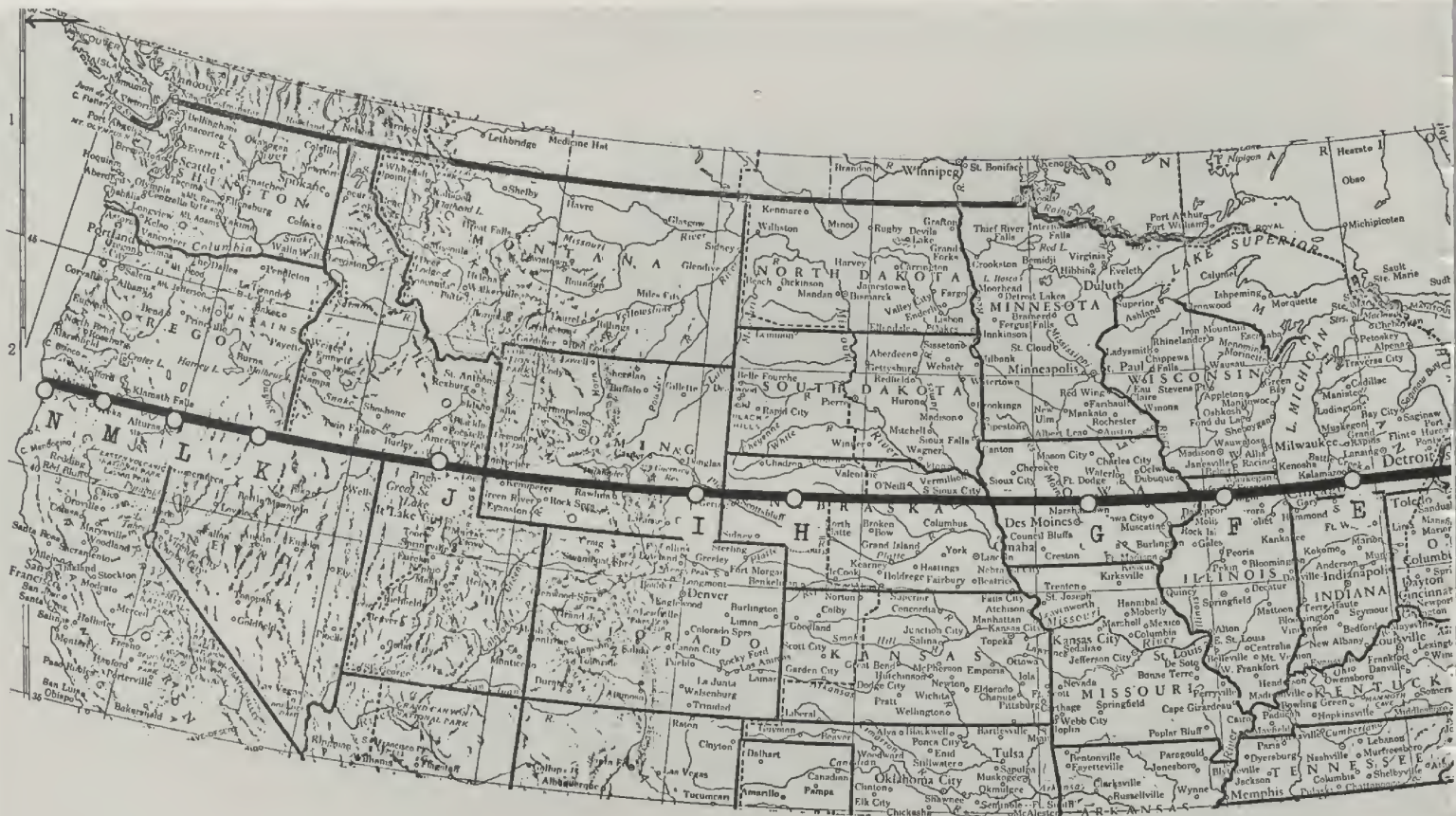


Above: What counts is not the form but the content. Joseph Kosuth's thinkworks, a series of definitions of such words as "definition," are calculated to impart only information as an idea, involving the observer to such a literal degree he forgets that the medium, the canvas in this case, has no message as a form.

Right: Bruce Nauman's thinkworks are tantalizers. Here he has made an aluminum slab but chose to hide the most interesting part; one of the two square surfaces was brightly polished, then placed face down on the floor.



Douglas Huebler's sculpture project of fixing fourteen locations on the 42° parallel across the United States is a thinkwork made up of three parts: the actual experience of making the trip, the graphic representation of the experience on a map and the attendant information that Huebler chooses to impart in writing. Collection of Alan P. Power.



SITE SCULPTURE PROJECT 42° PARALLEL
 14 LOCATIONS ('A' THROUGH 'N') ARE TOWNS EXISTING EITHER
 OR APPROXIMATELY ON THE 42° PARALLEL IN THE U.S.
 LOCATIONS HAVE BEEN MARKED BY THE EXCHANGE OF
 POSTAL RECEIPTS SENT FROM AND RETURNED TO
 MASSACHUSETTS. AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1967

thing. It has to do with everything except what it looks like." Lawrence Weiner, of New York, says his pieces can "be made or not made. I don't care about the physical character. There are as many ways to deal with non-objects as with objects." "Physical things deteriorate," adds New Yorker Joseph Kosuth. "Art is strength of idea, not material. Art should be about art and entail the purification of extraneous things like physical matter."

Huebler's impossible art is an art of documentation. A sociological embodiment of the new role of the artist as a lyrical dictator, Huebler documents through photographs and maps what he considers to be art and then provides information about it. "What I say is part of the art work," says Huebler. "I don't look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it's about." Huebler created a site-sculpture project called the *42 Degree Parallel Piece*. "Fourteen locations are towns existing either exactly or approximately on the 42 degree parallel in the United States," states the caption. "Most language about art is contained apart," explains Huebler. "People deny words have anything to do with pictures. I don't accept that. They do. Art is a source of information."

Kosuth paints ideas as ideas by creating a negative photostat on canvas of such words as "water," "nothing," "definition." "It

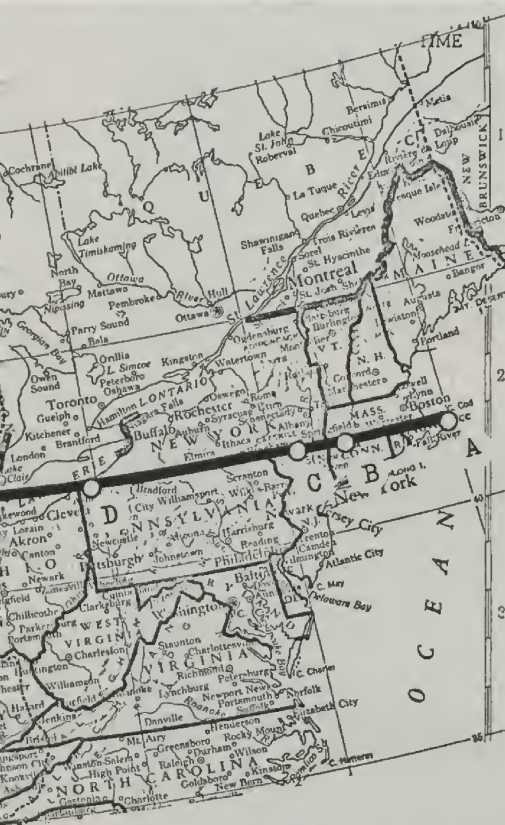
is impossible to see my work," says Kosuth. "What is seen is the presentation of the information. The art exists only as an invisible, ethereal idea."

Another artist, Robert Barry, proposes to use the carrier wave of a New York radio station as the medium for a work of art. Obviously not visual, the waves, according to Barry, "put anyone on the qui vive and make him aware, aware." Yet he says that "sound has nothing to do with it. The sound is only a clue to an entire environment, only a means to make people aware."

"You talk too much" is a remark that has never made any sense to Ian Wilson, whose art "form" is oral communication. "I present oral communication as an object," says Wilson. "All art is information and communication. I've chosen to speak rather than sculpt. I've freed art from a specific place. It's now possible for everyone. I'm diametrically opposed to the precious object. My art is not visual, but visualized."

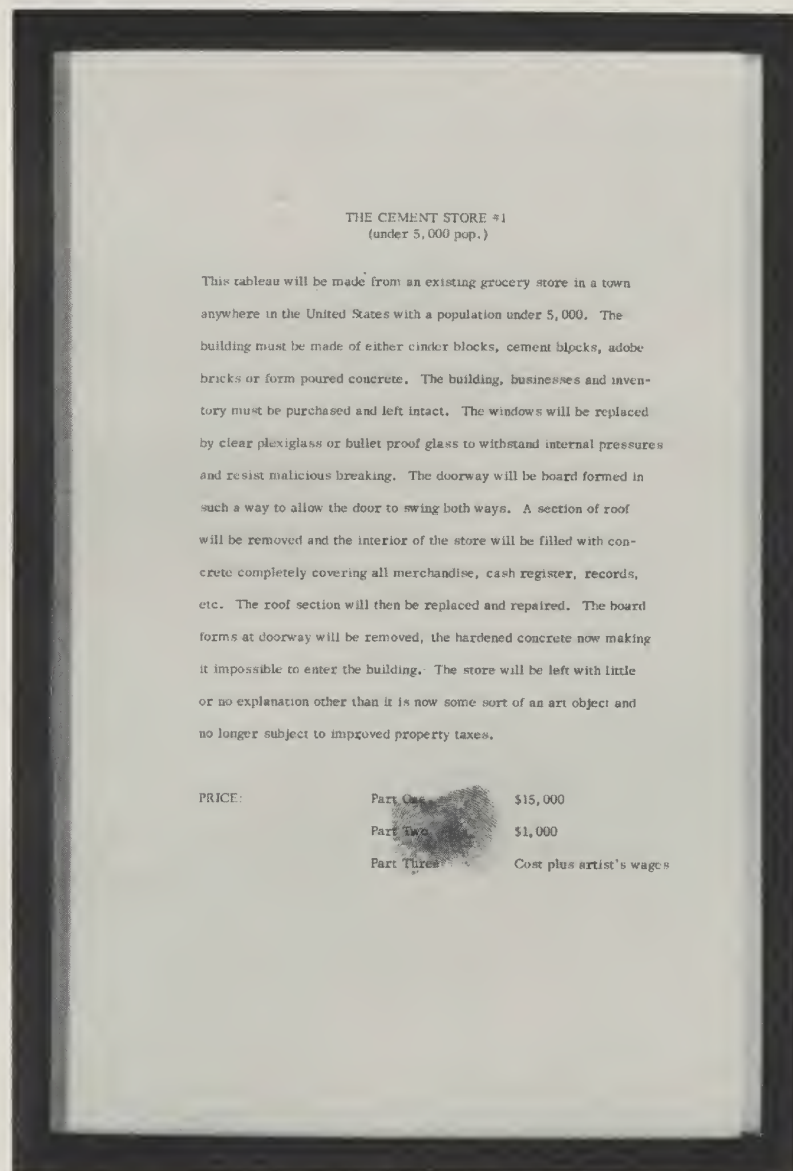
In a 1967 show at the Dwan Gallery, Edward Kienholz satirized the rising concept of think projects offered as art. He offered wry projects of his own, notably *The God Box* and *The Cement Store*, whose titles were printed on plaques and whose ludicrously detailed specifications-for-construction were listed on an accompanying plaque.

(continued)



PIECE
OTHER EXACTLY
UNITED STATES.
GE OF CERTIFIED
"A" - TRURO,
SEPTEMBER 1968

Kosuth, Huebler



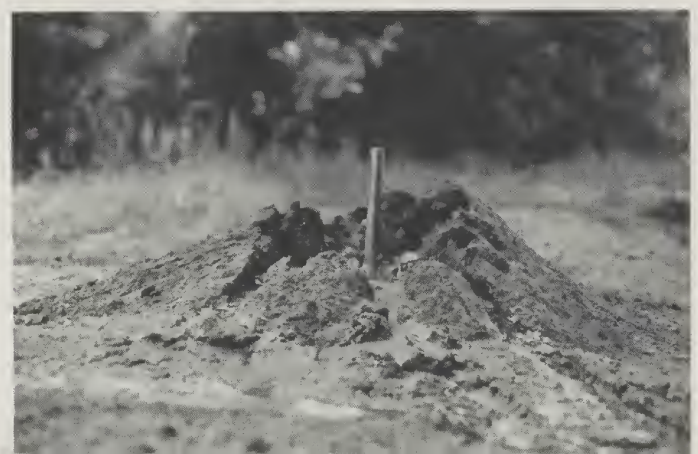
Art has become as literary as it is visual.
Edward Kienholz, in this thinkpiece, conjures
up with words satirical images of old
American towns—and new American artists.

Nihilworks

Nihilworks are, of course, destructive art. Like the thinkworks, they propose as their mission to reduce art to ideas, but more specifically their art achieves its creative meaning only when it is destroyed, only when irreversible change has triumphed over permanence. Nihilworks are hardly brand-new. Michelangelo shaped a snowman for the art patron Piero de' Medici, and to the joy of Michelangelo and even Piero, who was an avid possessor of objects, the man beautifully vanished before their eyes. Today many destructive artists make impermanence a policy. Iain Baxter has created a water fountain surrounded by dirt which erodes away as the water pours over it, and Mike Heizer has created a "symbolic" destruction of New York's Whitney Museum by "ferreting under the foundation." Of course, he dug only a few holes around the foundation, but those "depressions" were assertions that "the museum is now impossible in our society. It can exist only as a source of information."

Nihilworks have become so popular in advanced art circles that they were made the subject of a show last year at Finch Col-

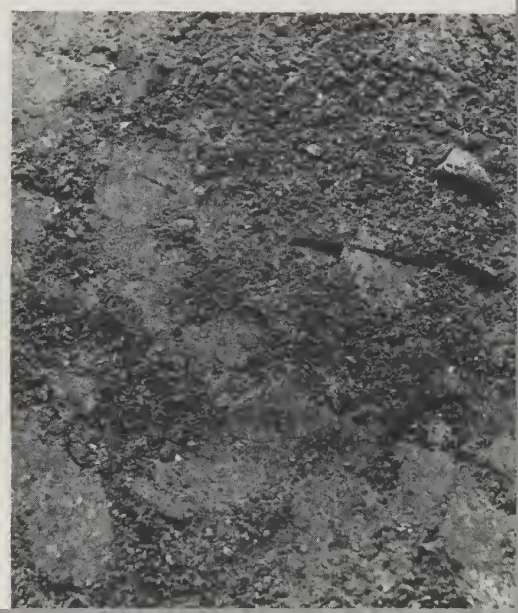
What looks like a periscope from the underground activities of an espionage rotorooter group is Iain Baxter's steel pipe that pours water out onto the dirt surrounding it and eventually erodes away the mound, which remains only a destroyed but theoretically more artistic fragment of its former physical self.





Creation in destruction is the conceit of nihilworks. Bici Hendricks' "Ice Sculpture" was made by freezing a flag and various odds-and-ends together into a block of ice. Miss Hendricks then hacks away with a pick, and as the ice melts the objects settle down into a soggy heap.

In a philosophical gesture of now-you-see-it-now-you-don't, Sol Lewitt created a thinkwork of a steel cube that he subsequently buried on the property of a Dutch friend in Bergeyk, Holland. "Is it there if you can't see it?" asks a skeptical observer. "Does it matter as long as you're thinking about it?" counters Lewitt.



lege in New York. Nihilartists have also formed DIAS, the "Destruction in Art Symposium" which was first held in London in 1966, and then in New York in 1968. To prove their destructive point, they slash their canvases, sometimes burn them, create contraptions that destroy themselves, build light sculptures that can blind the eyes. One of the nihilartists, Ralph Ortiz, kills chickens on stage—which, in his words, is "better than to give expression to my killer instincts, which we all have, and murder a person." He thus sees the annihilated work of art as a "necessary therapy." Others, like Bici Hendricks, freeze such objects as wedding dresses and old shoes and flags in blocks of ice and then create the art work by hacking away at the ice until the last bit is melted and the objects have casually fallen onto the ground in a pool of water.

Some artists present visible-invisible, now-you-see-it-now-you-don't conundrums. Sculptor Sol Lewitt made a steel cube and then buried it under the lawn of a family in Holland. "You have to accept it there as an act of faith," says Lewitt. "Even if you didn't think it was there, you'd still think about it every time you saw the earth covering it."

California artist Harold Paris is making, for the Whitney Museum in New York, a room filled with all types of forms, hard and soft, smooth and rough. He will then seal off the room. The visitor will contemplate the outside of the room, seated on a bench in front of it. In a similar spirit, Bruce Nauman polishes to a mirror reflection one side of a metal slab and then buries that part, the most interesting part of the piece, in the ground, leaving the dull side exposed. "Art should raise questions," says Nauman. Les Levine places a given number of objects in a room and each day a number of the objects are removed, so that the viewer is faced with the diminishing physicality of the present and the shifting memory of the past.

Such works defy the concept of permanence which up to now has motivated artists to create. Les Levine has produced a series of disposable "non-object" objects like paper cups. "This work is not concerned with ownership," he says. "It is concerned with active experience. The purchaser may arrange the object. The disposable, in fact, does not become art until arranged by someone. With disposable art you are free from any historical or monetary values."



Les Levine is a master nihilworker who rationally and methodically took away a predetermined number of pieces each day from this assemblage until nothing was left on the walls.

Archiworks

Though considerably harnessed by a possible art that requires complete spelling out in materials and costs, architecture has frequently indulged in impossible art, from the ideal cities of Leonardo and Filarete to Frank Lloyd Wright's mile-high skyscraper. Much of the architecture being designed today looks impossible. Yet, because of the rapid development of technologies, the building which today seems impossible may very well be possible tomorrow. Certainly the fantastic cenotaphs and armillaries of Ledoux and Boulle looked impossible in the eighteenth century but seem to have found realization in the geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller.

"The architecture of our day is noteworthy for its tendency toward the poetic and visionary," says Columbia University professor of art history George Collins. "As with pop painting, kinetic sculpture and electronic music, our very definition of what art is or can be has been exploded, opening up enormous possibilities for creation and expression. . . . We have all been overwhelmed by the megalomaniacal scale on which our urban environment presses down on us; this has stimulated some among us to strike back and to design a substitute world of the same size."

One of the most dramatic recent developments has been the concept of a megastructure frame which provides shelves that can serve as sites for buildings, neighborhoods or towns. It thereby frees the surfaces of the earth for other purposes besides build-

This archiwork is the 29-story polyethylene "bratwurst" that Christo erected at last year's Documenta exhibition in Kassel, Germany, an example of an impossible work made possible.



ing. A unique scheme of this type is the Instant City by Stanley Tigerman, two trapezoid-filled triangles that are designed for rapid assembly.

Like the pop-ish Roman bakers' tombs in the form of ovens, Claes Oldenburg's "proposed" monuments for cities take the shapes of favorite foods. He has designed a colossal frankfurter approximating the "shape of a ship" for Staten Island and a gigantic Good Humor bar to replace New York's Pan Am Building. He also designed an impossible Underground Drainpipe Building that, according to him, would be observed by looking "down into a hole in the earth."

Christo's monumental projects include packaging buildings and entire cities with polyethylene and ropes. He had plans to enshroud the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but at the last minute the project was turned down as a fire hazard. He hopes someday to wrap up all of downtown Manhattan ("I am making some of my impossible proposals possible realities"). Christo did succeed in packaging museums in Bern and Chicago and in airlifting by helicopter a 42,390 cubic-foot "Empaquetage" in Minneapolis. Last year at the Documenta IV exhibition in Kassel, Germany, he finally got up what was called a "giant bratwurst," a 180-ton air-pressured cylinder as tall as New York's Seagram Building.

The Archigram group of young British architects, who are concerned with exploring the future possibilities of urban development without the restraint of a client or specific projects,

give free rein to impossible archiworks. Inspired by the Cape Kennedy constructions, their rocketlike entertainment center, designed for Expo 67 at Montreal, is an example of their renunciation, according to Archigram member Peter Cook, of "any preconceived esthetic in favor of industrial forms—the forms of an oil refinery or rocket ship."

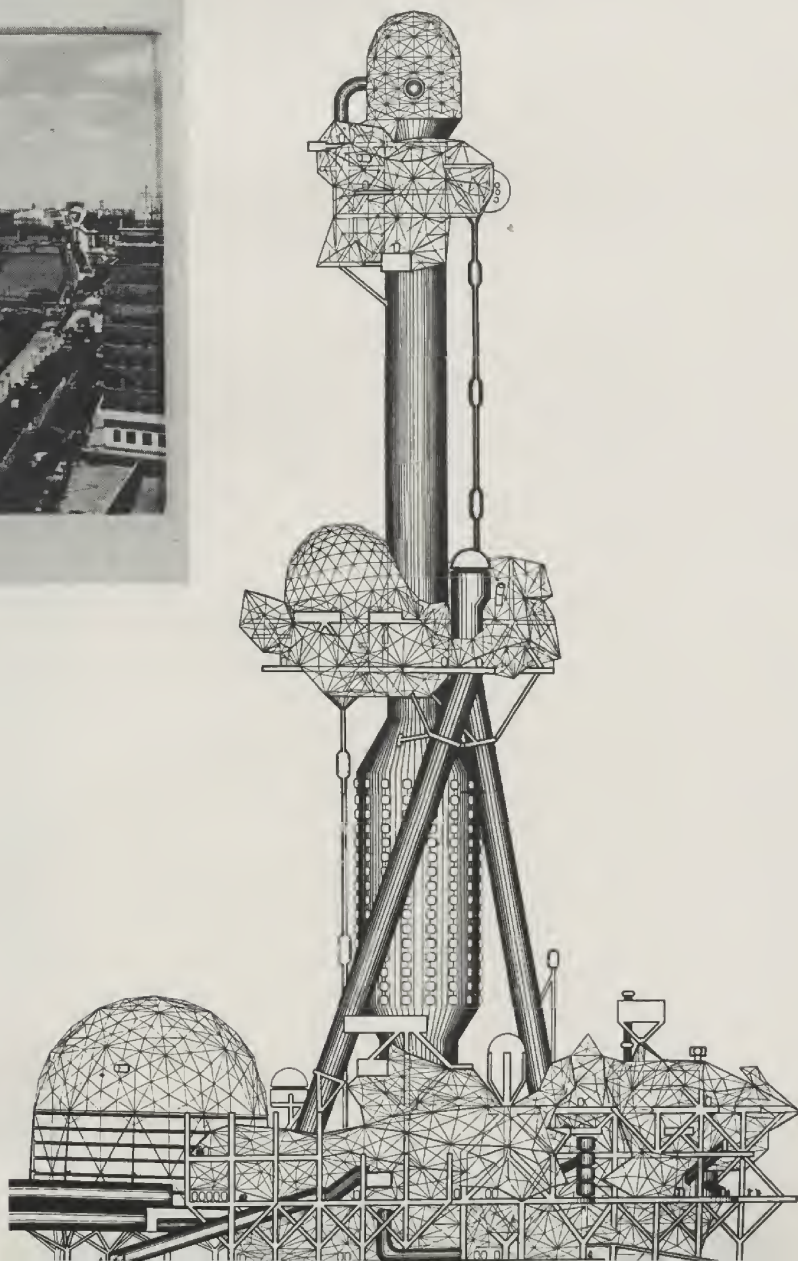
They have also created what seem to be fantasy creatures from a Howard Fast short story. Their "Walking Cities" are city-sized machines designed to walk on long telescope-like legs; the hollow legs also serve as "communication between buildings" and as "sewers, elevators and ventilators." Such works, according to Professor Collins, are impossible in our present system, for "flow and interchange, controlled obsolescence and rebuilding have become the constants."

And yet "controlled obsolescence," a concept repugnant to the still-prominent teaching of the Beaux-Arts, has become a worthy preoccupation of many bright young architects. "Until we shake off the traditions of the Beaux-Arts and the concepts of a centristic architecture of permanence," says young architect John Patrick Grady, "we cannot have an indeterminate architecture of change. Society finds it impossible to think in terms of a structure which is 100' x 200' x 300' x 5 months, indicating the length of its existence." Grady's photograph of a landscape with the sign "New York City Will Return . . ." is a striking metaphor of the change we must grow to accept: a city that can move from one place to another and return, if necessary.



The world's biggest privies seemingly contributed these toilet ball-floats that visionary Claes Oldenburg designed for the Thames in London. As in much of today's impossible art, one senses here the artist's desire to pull the chain. Altered postcard, collection of Carroll Janis.

Archigram, a progressive team of English architects, has designed such revolutionary projects as a city that walks and this "Tower of Pleasure" with theaters and gymnasiums. It is modeled after a Cape Kennedy space rocket.



The impossible in art and architecture may not be totally new, but today it is prevalent as at no other time in history. It has become a strong trend which must be recognized as a reflection of our age—statistically an age of achievement, but psychologically a time of frustration. Impossible art is indeed creativity in frustration. In some artists this creativity produces a sardonic expression of frustration itself, an aggressively futile gibe at futility. In others it leaps across restraints to attain an unhampered wide-angle vision. Impossible art is often the most intimate and the most ambitious statement an artist can make. His impossible project does not have to meet with the approval of society; it exists solely as his own cherished idea. The impossible is an “utter” art, an art pushed to the extreme. Madame de Staël caught the spirit of the impossible when she wrote, “All those gradations, those prudent manners and nuances that are to prepare for the great effects—are not to my liking. One does not arrive at the sublime by degrees.”

John P. Grady's sign pasted on a landscape wraps up the past, present and future into one concept. His photo collage, sly and threatening, is also a significant metaphor that someday in the future collapsible-reinflatable cities can be moved from place to place.

